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RHMFIISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 NAIROBI 001874

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TAGS: PINR PINS PREL PTER MASS MOPS KISL KPAO KE SO

SUBJECT: LAMU LEADERS GIVE U.S. EFFORTS MIXED REVIEWS

REF: A. REF A) 03 NAIROBI 03521

1B. REF B) NAIROBI 0799

Classified By: PolCouns Michael J. Fitzpatrick, reasons 1.4 (b,d)

11. (U) SUMMARY: Poloffs addressed a Town Hall meeting of the Lamu County Council, and responded to community's concerns about USG policies, military presence in Lamu and various assistance programs. The tone of the meeting was cordial, although several participants expressed resentment over perceptions that Americans view Lamu residents as terrorists and that American &marines8 were harassing people during their coastal patrol exercises. Poloffs, answers to these questions and concerns were well-received. END SUMMARY.

12. (U) The Lamu County Council, at the request of their Chairman Omar Famau, hosted a consultative meeting between Lamu leaders and Embassy officials on April 6. Two Poloffs represented the Embassy in what proved to be a constructive dialogue about U.S. relations with the region (just south of the Somali border on Kenya's Indian Ocean coast), views on terrorism, military presence and assistance programs in Lamu. The Council hosted a similar meeting in July 2003 to discuss ongoing joint military exercises in the region and ask for assurances that citizens would not be adversely affected (ref A). This time around, three themes dominated: 1) Why is there such a U.S. presence in Lamu?, 2) Why do Americans view Lamu residents as terrorists?, and 3) Why do your &Marines8 harass our people?

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U.S. Assistance Praised  
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13. (U) Omar Famau opened the meeting by thanking the &good will team from the Embassy8 for our openness, noting that &the lack of adequate information leads to misinformation, which in turn results in suspicion, speculation and mistrust8. He appealed to the Embassy to continue being transparent with our programs and to keep the provincial administration, local authorities and the general public fully informed of our activities in the district. He thanked the U.S. for the various civic development assistance projects, saying the list of projects is long and the number of beneficiaries continues to grow. He then asked us to consider undertaking a larger project, the Kiunga-Mokowe road. He said such a project would benefit the Lamu economy greatly and open Kiunga Division to the rest of Kenya (ref B).

14. (U) The District Officer (DO), representing the District Commissioner, commended the warm relations and peaceful collaboration between the U.S. and Lamu. He said our development projects have contributed to a good image for the U.S. and have helped create a peaceful atmosphere. He attributed Lamu's security and stability in part to U.S. assistance, telling the audience that security must be looked

at in the light of improving the standard of living through reducing poverty, increasing education opportunities, etc.

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Why Lamu?  
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15. (U) The question of why the U.S. shows so much interest in Lamu was asked by several participants and with various undertones. On the one hand, some asked for greater U.S. assistance and more development projects. On the other hand, some implied the U.S. has a hidden agenda and focuses too much on Lamu. One participant gave a particularly insightful speech about the history of the relationship between Lamu and the U.S., asking if this relationship began because of the Global War on Terrorism. He explained that when Somali bandits raided Lamu villages in the early 1960s, the U.S. was the only foreign country to assist many of the displaced villagers. He continued that while Middle Eastern countries provided arms to Somali bandits, the U.S. helped Muslim communities in Lamu. He then asked why, if this friendship dates back so far, is the U.S. now suspicious of certain Lamu communities. He blamed it on &cooked-up propaganda<sup>8</sup> (NFI) and exploitation by some &bad people<sup>8</sup> who take advantage of poor communities to hide terrorists. He mused over why Americans returned en masse to Lamu after 2001, saying it appears to be part of a global campaign to hunt for terrorists. But he ended his speech by assuring us, and the other participants, that Lamu and the U.S. remain friends, and any misunderstandings are a result of ignorance and must be forgiven.

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We are not terrorists

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16. (U) Several other participants asked what the U.S., true intentions are in Lamu. Although all were thankful for our various development programs, many insisted that Americans think of Lamu residents as &terrorists.<sup>8</sup> Several made accusations that we refuse Americans the right to travel to Lamu because of this suspicion. Poloff assured the audience that we have no official policy against traveling to Lamu and clarified the travel warning issue. Most seemed satisfied when Poloff explained the Embassy would not let her travel, alone, repeatedly to Lamu if it was viewed as a dangerous or threatening environment.

17. (C) The Councilor from Witu pleaded with us not to blame his town for their mistakes. (NOTE: Mohamed Sadeek Odeh, who was convicted in 2001 for his role in the 1998 U.S. Embassy bombings, had lived in Witu before the attacks. END NOTE). The Councilor said Americans no longer trust the people of Witu because they married one of their &daughters<sup>8</sup> to a &bad guy<sup>8</sup>. He asked that we forgive his village for this mistake and not ostracize them. (COMMENT: Witu lies along the road from Mombasa to Manda Bay, where the U.S. Navy is involved in maritime operations training. U.S. convoys have, in the past, driven through the town regularly without stopping. The frequency of these convoys has reduced since CJTF-HOA began using the Manda Air Field. Civil Affairs teams have yet to provide any projects for the village. Thus the perception that the U.S. is purposely shunning Witu is understandable. Poloff and the CA team visited Witu the day before the town hall meeting and began engaging leaders and looking into potential projects. END COMMENT).

18. (C) The most impassioned speech came from recently released Kikambala terrorist suspect, and current Siyu councilor, Mohamed Kubwa (junior). (NOTE: Kubwa was released from prison on June 9, 2005 after being acquitted of charges related to the November 2002 Kikambala attacks in Kenya. END NOTE). He said he does not blame the U.S. Government for his incarceration. Instead, he blamed the Kenyan Government, who

he accused of arresting him merely to prove to the U.S. they were taking action following the Kikambala bombing. In fact, he thanked us for CA projects in Lamu. He was particularly thankful for the recently approved Siyu secondary school project. (NOTE: Poloff traveled to Siyu with the CA team on April 4 to visit with community leaders and announce the school project. Kubwa was noticeably absent from the meeting with elders and leaders. Poloff was told the organizers of the meeting had purposely excluded him so as not to make us uncomfortable. END NOTE). Kubwa continued by using proverbs from Lao Tsu and others to emphasize the need for open communication in order to solve problems. He praised the town hall meeting as a step in this direction. He finished by assuring us that Lamu is a safe district that was taken advantage of by others (implying the Kikambala terrorists). He repeated that he did not blame the U.S. but said the Kenyan government handled the delicate situation incorrectly.

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Tensions Surround U.S. Military Presence  
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¶9. (U) Issues surrounding the U.S. naval presence and combined military operations along the Lamu coast continue to cause considerable concern. Several participants accused &Marines8 of harassing local fishermen and villagers while patrolling the waters. While most said they were not opposed to the training, they asked that our military forces take into consideration the welfare of the local population. In particular, they asked that boats use slower speeds when approaching dhows and that Americans not search Muslim women. Poloff explained that the boardings and searches are actually carried out by the Kenyan Navy and assured the audience that U.S. Navy personnel do not search Muslim women. She told the participants that the U.S. takes these matters very seriously and will continue to ensure that all U.S. military personnel act within strict guidelines. The DO further explained that it is the GOK's responsibility to guarantee the security of all citizens. He explained that the &Marines8 provide technical assistance to the Kenyan Navy, but Kenyans are the ones who come into actual contact with the people. He said the U.S. has always followed proper procedures and urged the people to launch any complaints through the proper channels.

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COMMENT  
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¶10. (C) The two hour meeting proved to be extremely

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beneficial to all involved. The community leaders seemed genuinely pleased with the opportunity to voice their concerns, and they were receptive to explanations from Poloffs. Most of the complaints were nothing new, especially regarding the navy training and operations. However, hearing directly from Embassy officials, instead of through the County Council Chairman, seemed to put the leaders more at ease. The fact that, despite all our engagement efforts, many think we view Lamu residents as terrorists is unfortunate. Ongoing engagement in Witu and Siyu in particular, where terrorist suspects have hidden in the past, will help build trust and demonstrate that we do not view them as terrorists.

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